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ABSTRACT

A fervent idealist whose dream was to eliminate illiteracy throughout the world, Frank C. Laubach sought to bring Christianity to the masses by giving them the ability to read and spread the teachings of the Bible. In working with people in the nonindustrialized nations, Laubach also saw the need for economic and political self-sufficiency. He believed literacy could be a means of emancipation for the downtrodden. During his lifetime, Laubach personally conducted literacy campaigns in 65 countries and helped to prepare literacy charts and primers in 312 different languages. Laubach's literacy work began in the Philippines, where he developed a system using "key words" to teach consonant and vowel sounds--and ultimately words--to the Moro people, a group of Moslem Filipinos. During the 1930s Laubach developed phonetic primers, including key word charts, in hundreds of languages for use in India, Africa, and Asia. He spread the word of "lightning literacy," the ability to teach an illiterate to read in a few short lessons. When he could not travel in Asia during World War II, he focused his attention on Central and South America. The thrust of Laubach's work for many years was not illiteracy in the United States, but illiteracy in countries where the majority of people could not read. In the 1950s, however, Laubach's methods were adapted for Americans. (One chart is included, and 11 references are appended.) (MM)

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Frank C. Laubach, Literacy Pioneer

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According to Arnove and Graff in their book, National Literacy Campaigns (1987), a literacy campaign is initiated not as an end in itself, but as a means to promulgate some political or moral view. Also, a literacy campaign usually revolves around some charismatic leader who can rally a special strike force of teachers. Frank C. Laubach can be viewed in this light. He was a fervent idealist whose dream was to eliminate illiteracy throughout the world. His primary purpose within this vision was to bring Christianity to the unsaved masses and to give them the ability to read and spread the teachings of the Bible. In working with the nonindustrialized nations, Laubach also saw the need for economic and political self-sufficiency. He believed literacy could be a means of emancipation for the downtrodden. The following words were spoken by Laubach to Mahatma Gandhi concerning illiteracy in India:

> The right way to lift the masses above hunger is to teach them to lift themselves. Your illiterates have been the victims of educated scoundrels, who have kept them in debt all their lives. Literacy is the only road I see to their complete emancipation. (Laubach, 1970, p. 22)

During his lifetime, Laubabach personally conducted literacy campaigns in 65 countries and helped to prepare literacy charts and primers in 312 different languages.

He has been given credit for bringing literacy to over 100,000,000 people.

Laubach did not begin his career with the idea of being a crusader for world literacy. Teaching and the ministry were, however, early focuses in his life. Laubach's childhood home in Benton, Pennsylvania, was situated in proximity to the town library and the Methodist Church. These two institutions made deep impressions on Laubach. Before reaching his teen years, he had read all of the 600 books in the library. He was especially impressed by Thomas a Kempis's book, The Imitation of Christ, dealing with prayer, contemplation, and the disciplined life. By the time he was 16 or 17, Laubach was in charge of the Sunday school at Benton Methodist Church.

When he was 17 Laubach began teaching in a country school. This increased his desire for teaching, and Laubach enrolled in Bloomsburg Normal School. While at Bloomsburg, a lieutenant from the U.S. Army came and made a strong appeal for young men to go to the Phillipine Islands as teachers. Laubach was too young to apply, but this event left an impression on him.

After Bloomsburg, Laubach went to Perkiomen Seminary, a school staffed by devoutly religious men and women. Laubach excelled as a scholar and an athlete. He was particularly able in languages and debate.

Laubach attended Princeton University from 1905-1909.

After graduating, he spent five years in New York City where he did sociology graduate work at Columbia University, studied at Union Theological Seminary, and worked among alcoholics, jobless, and derelicts in a slum settlement house. He completed his Master's Degree and continued to work toward a doctorate in sociology, which he received in 1915. Laubach had completed his studies at Union Seminary in 1913. Also, it was during this time in New York City that he married.

In 1915 Laubach and his wife were sponsored by the Congregationalist Church as missionaries to the Phillipine Islands. Laubach's pioneering literacy work occurred among the Moros of the Phillipines. However, when he and his wife first arrived on the island of Mindanao, it was not considered safe for missionaries to approach the Moros.

When the Spanish took control of the Phillipines in the 16th century, they had been fighting the Moslem Moors in Spain. When they found Moslems in the Phillipines, the Spanish called them "Moros" and waged war against them also. Although the Spanish were able to force the Moros onto Mindanao, the major southernmost island of the Phillipines, the Moros never forsake their Moslem beliefs. Under American rule, the Moros still fiercely resisted outside control.

So, when the Laubachs arrived in 1915, American military officers convinced them that "the Moros were too hostile and, being Moslems, would be completely unwilling to accept Christian missionaries." (Mason, 1967, p. 55)

So the Laubachs took up residence in Cagayan, a city on the northwest coast of Mindanao. They spent five years there in "interesting but routine missionary work." (Mason, p. 55) The next several years the Laubachs lived in Manila where Frank helped form the Union Theological Seminary and taught sociology, psychology, and education. Also, he was able to do research about the Phillipines and to write some books about the islands and their people. Later, Laubach taught at Manila University which he left to become Dean of Union College, a junior college which prepared students for the seminary. While serving on the Board of Trustees at Union College, he was considered for the position of president of the college. When he did not receive that post, Laubach was bitterly disappointed. The next couple of years he was plagued by illness and became dispirited toward his work in the Phillipines. In 1929 he returned to the island of Mindanao planning to start a normal school to train teachers for Lanao Province. However, there were too few educated young people to support such a school. Again he felt disappointment.

While in Lanao, Laubach attempted to talk and make friends with the Moros who either had shops or who came to shop there. He was met consistently with resentment and hostility. After a month Laubach was deeply discouraged and feeling like a failure. At this point, he had a spiritual experience which changed the course of his endeavors. Always

a religious man, Laubach spent much time in prayer. During prayer, he felt God's message to stop being the superior white man to the Moros and instead, learn to love them as Moros. The next day Laubach spoke to Moro priests and told them he wanted to study the Koran. They crowded into his cottage eagerly, and thus began a sharing of religious points of view. As they explained about the four books of the Koran, Laubach indicated that he was familiar with the first three books since they were part of his Bible. The men discussed stories familiar to Christians and Moslems.

The Moros came to trust and respect Laubach greatly. They were impressed by his spiritual habits and diligence in trying to do God's work. They told him, "Any man who tries to remember God all the time is like Mohammed himself. We love to listen to you because you tell us beautiful things from the Koran." (Laubach, 1970, p. 33) In fact, because of his intensive religious training, Laubach probably was more familiar with most of the Koran than the Moros priests.

Laubach learned Maranaw, the Moros' language, and proceeded to put it on paper using Roman letters and a purely phonetic approach - each sound was represented by just one letter. Laubach acquired a printing press which he used to publish a weekly newsletter. The newsletter was extremely popular and became a motivation for the illiterates to learn to read. Laubach and an associate, Donato Galia, a graduate of Teachers College, Columbia University, were

thrilled to set up a school and begin teaching. However, they were frustrated with the slow pace of their students' learning. When Laubach and Galia used "key words" to teach the consonant and vowel sounds, they noted a much quicker pace of learning. They used three key words which contained all the Maranaw consonants. From the syllables of the key words, many other familiar words could be written and learned. After the learners made the association of the sounds with the letters, it was easy to combine the twelve consonant sounds with the four vowel sounds to create any word in their language.

The ease with which a Moro could learn to read and the pride he felt with that accomplishment brought many, many Moros to Laubach and Galia insisting that they, too, be taught to read. Some who learned to read were trained to teach others and for awhile, Laubach was able to pay them for their teaching. However, with the Great Depression, it became very difficult for Laubach to get the money from his American supporters to continue paying the teachers. When Laubach told several of the teachers that they would no longer be paid, some of them volunteered to continue without pay. But the most significant response came from a fierce Moro chieftain. He said, "I'll make everybody who knows how to read teach somebody else, or I'll kill him." (Laubach, 1970, p. 44) Laubach happily wrote:

> Everybody taught. Nobody died. Everybody liked it. I did not like the motto "teach or die" and so I changed it to "Each One Teach One," and this method started by the Moro chieftain, has gone around the world. (p. 44)

Word of Laubach's success with teaching illiterates to read quickly spread. During the 1930's Laubach developed primers including key word charts in hundreds of languages for use with illiterates in India, Africa, and Asia. He spread the word of "lightening literacy," the ability to teach an illiterate to read in a few short lessons. Indeed, in languages such as that of the Moros, a person could learn all of the sounds and letters representing them in two or three lessons.

As the level of complexity of the language increased so did the number of lessons necessary in the primer. After 25 years of preparing primers for nonreaders, Laubach reached these totals for the number of lessons needed in the primer:

> In simple languages like the Polynesian languages between Hawaii and New Zealand, there are only twelve letters. These can be taught in one or two days. All of the Malay languages of India require about fifteen lessons. All of the languages using the Arabic alphabet require about fifteen lessons. Spanish, Portuguese and Italian and many African languages require about ten lessons. French requires eighteen. As soon as the phonetics

> re well known, the primer ends . . . Streamlined English is a textbook which teaches the English Phonetics in thirty lessons. Even after the student knows this book he will have trouble with many irregular English words. (Laubach, 1960, p. 25)

The thrust of Laubach's work for many years was not illiteracy in the United States, but illiteracy in countries where the majority of people could not read. A significant portion of his time during the 1930's and the early 1940's was spent in India. He not only worked on developing key word charts and primers, but he also spent a lot of time speaking to groups interested in implementing literacy programs. These groups often were missionary workers and government workers given the task of providing literacy training for the masses. Laubach garnered much attention and acclaim for his Each One Teach One plan. He believed this method had the best potential for success due to its inexpensiveness and its capability of spreading literacy to large numbers of people. In India if everyone who learned to read did in fact teach another to read, the results would be as he wrote in Forty Years with the Silent Billion:

> In 1938 8% were literate. If each of the 8% taught one that year, then in 1939 16% would be literate, in 1940 32% would be literate, in 1941 64% would be literate, and in 1942 128% would be literate! That

extra 28% would make up for the increase in population! Of course this is pure idealism. (p. 112)

Idealism, yes, but those kinds of statements provided the hope and faith to India that mass literacy was possible. Laubach's accounts of his work in India indicate great enthusiasm for his method whenever he presented it. Although it would be difficult to measure Laubach's effect objectively, it is significant that his influence is noted in Adult Education in India, a Book of Readings edited by Bordia, Kidd, and Draper (1973). It states that Laubach was particularly influential in Punjab. In 1937 he inspired a large number of teachers at Moga which resulted in Literacy Leagues developing in all districts.

When Laubach was unable to travel in Asia during the years of World War II, his zeal for spreading literacy was focused on Central and South American peoples. Interspersed with his travels, he would engage in speaking tours in the United States where he would espouse the cause for world literacy. These speaking tours aroused the interest of Americans and helped to supply money and manpower to continue the literacy efforts. One of the main supporters behind Laubach's work was the Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature. This organiztion was a melding of Laubach's World Literacy Committee formed in 1935 by his sponsoring church with the Foreign Missions Conference of

the National Council of Churches. A main function of the Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature was to supply written materials for the newly literate people. Laubach's "lightening literacy" would result in beginning readers left with nothing to read. Part of the solution came from his son, Robert S. Laubach, and Syracuse University. Robert helped develop graduate courses at Syracuse in literacy journalism. Syracuse became a major center for training in the Laubach method and in developing practical reading matter for the new adult reader.

Laubach became especially concerned with the lack of suitable easy reading materials as he became aware of the spread of Communism in underdeveloped countries. Laubach's concern for the future led him to write a book, Wake Up or Blow Up in 1951. The aim of this book was to warn Americans of the potential danger of living in a country of unequaled wealth within the world community of a disproportionate number of hungry, poverty stricken masses. Laubach implored the United States to offer technological and educational assistance. He believed the Third World countries were anxious for assistance and they would accept it from Communists if Americans were unwilling to give it.

The 1950's also saw Laubach's methods adapted for Americans. Laubach was very outspoken about the irregular spelling of English, and for many years he had avoided trying to adapt his phonetic approach to English. But as he became

aware of the problems of the foreign born attempting to learn English and the problems of American born illiterates, he became willing to work on an English literacy program. As with other literacy programs he developed, the first step was to find key words that began with the consonant and vowel sounds being presented. Then these consonant and vowel letters would be superimposed over a picture of the object or action identified by the word being used. (See Chart 1.)

Having the picture and the letter share the same shape provides the new reader a visual cue to remember the configuration of the letter and the sound that the letter makes. Laubach described this technique as "providing a hook to hang your letters on and so aid your memory." (1970, p. 257) In Robert C. Aukerman's book, Approaches to Beginning Reading (1971), he explained the process this way:

> The psychological principle is that of "cue reduction" and "conditioned learning". The first stimulus is shown in the key picture in the first box. This is followed by a box in which the letter synbol is superimposed over a faded drawing of the original key picture. Finally the key picture is completely eliminated and the letter symbol then becomes the S^2 in the conditioning process. It is essentially the same process as demonstrated by Pavlov in his famous learning experiment with the meat, (S^1) and response of salivation (R^1). The bell (S^2)

Chart 1

English

		bird b	B B b b
		cup c	C C c c
		dish d	D D d d
		fish f	F F f f
		girl g	G G g g
		hand h	H H h h

This is a bird.
This is a cup.
This is a dish.
This is a fish.
This is a girl.
This is a hand.

The girl has a bird.
The girl has a cup.
The girl has a dish.
The girl has a fish.

The girl has a bird in her hand.
The girl has a cup in her hand.
The girl has a dish in her hand.
The girl has a fish in her hand.

For extra copies of this sheet (10¢) address Box 131, Syracuse 10, N. Y.

This is a supplement to Toward World Literacy, Frank C. and Robert S. Laubach. Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press. 1960.

became the substitute stimulus, as the meat cue was reduced. (p. 354)

Laubach emphasized two important concepts about teaching adults. First, he felt it was important to provide lessons easy enough to allow the student almost instant success. His "Picture-Word-Syllable" lessons provided that. Second, Laubach believed the student should be treated with genuine respect and caring. When he was confronted by people who said that his charts and primers did not work, Laubach was convinced that it was not the charts that were wrong, but it was the way they were being presented. As he developed the program more, he included very specific instructions on how the tutor should respond to the student. Note the following instructions found in Toward World Literacy, Chapter 4, "How to Treat the Adult Illiterate":

> Treat the student like a king . . . The slightest suggestion that the teacher feels superior will ruin the teaching, for the illiterate adult is extremely sensitive . . . Do not criticize him but be increasingly enthusiastic about his progress . . .
>
> Love your student. The illiterate cannot read books but he does read human nature, and he knows in a second whether your smile reveals real brotherly interest . . .
>
> Too many words waste time. Don't repeat a word

> after the pupil. It sounds patronizing and irritates adults . . .
>
> Let the student set his own pace . . . Adults differ far more than children in their knowledge and mental alertness; this is one reason why the "one by one" method is preferable . . . You must neither hold the student back nor push him farther than he wishes to go. (pp. 35-38)

These attitudes which Laubach applied in the teaching of adults can be found in current literature on adult education. Malcom Knowles wrote of the importance of establishing a psychological learning climate for adults. It "should be one which causes adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported; in which there exists a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students." (Knowles, 1980, p. 47)

Underlying the principles of adult education is the fact that teaching adults is different from teaching children. James R. Kidd wrote, "There are an increasing number of adult educationists, in the United States and abroad, who believe that there is a strong case for a different 'science of teaching' - andragogy to distinguish it from pedagogy." (Kidd, 1973, p. 36) Knowles provides further explanation of andragogy: "Andragogy is based upon the insight that the deepest need an adult has is to be treated as as adult, to be treated as a self-directing person, to be treated with respect." (Kidd,1973, p. 36)

Although Laubach's instruction to "Love your student" probably arose more from his Christian missionary philosophy, the concept of respect for the student is important.

Laubach's strong urging to the tutor to encourage the student came from his experience of working with illiterates who showed signs of feeling inferior due to their lack of reading ability. Laubach's belief that much encouragement is needed by the illiterate is reflected in the idea that "people deal with a failure when they have experienced many successes. Support and assistance is especially important for adults with few recent educational experiences." (Knox, 1977, p. 410) Knox also pointed out that "optimal learning performance is more likely when learners can proceed at their own pace," another concept advocated by Laubach.

Definitely, Laubach's attitudes toward the adult learner were appropriate; however, his teaching materials, especially those in English, have been criticized. Part of the problem is due to the fact that Laubach's materials rely on a phonemic approach to reading. As Laubach himself indicated many times, the English language's spelling and phonetic irregularities make it one of the most difficult languages to learn to read. Laubach attempted to regularize English spelling in the beginning books for adults. Laubach claims that "Streamlined English teaches every irregular common word in the English language, and shows how it would be spelled if it were regular. Any student, after finishing Streamlined English,will be

able to pronounce, without aid from the teacher, nine words out of every ten that he meets on an ordinary reading page." (Laubach, 1970, p. 149)

In terms of content, Laubach knew the importance of providing relevant topics for the new reader:

> Illiterate men are no more interested in reading only children's books than educated men are. Adult illiterates are mature men and women, with burning life problems and adult points of view . . . People who have recently been illiterate must be provided with helpful books and papers. (Laubach, 1960, p. 127)

Although Laubach professed this aim of providing meaningful reading, Jonathan Kozol in Illiterate America (1985, p. 53) cites some of the sentences from Streamlined English as examples of reading materials that are boring and irrelevant to adults.

Despite shortcomings, Laubach's methods and materials have been used throughout the world to teach adults to read ever since his literacy work began with the Moros in 1930. Today, throughout the United States, Laubach Literacy, Inc. trains volunteers to teach American adults to read. Although Laubach's dream of eliminating illiteracy has not been achieved, he was truly a pioneer in literacy. No other single person has done more to spread the concept of world literacy than did Frank C. Laubach.

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